

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

September 10

2017

What Happened In Grayling, Michigan, a report from John Isaac Edwards:

In February 2014, Ryan Thomas (his wife Jennifer) began working with the church in Grayling, MI in preaching the gospel as they endeavored to patiently bring them back to the old paths. This area of Michigan has been a stronghold of liberalism. The closest sound congregation known to us is more than 2 hours away. Two different mindsets exist in this congregation. These came to a head as I was invited to come preach three nights in a gospel meeting August 22-24, with the request to speak one evening on institutionalism. To help lay the groundwork, I preached the first night on Bible Authority. I pointed out our need for authority, the source of it, generic and specific authority, expediency, silence, and how authority is established. As I began, I mentioned that my appeal was to the word of the Lord. The word of the Lord is right (Ps. 33:4). If what we believe, teach and practice is according to the Lord's word then it is right and cannot be wrong. But if it is not according to His word then it is wrong and can't be right. If you hear something said tonight that you believe to be in error, please do not leave without bringing that to my attention that we might sit down together and look into the matter, and if it be that I have taught error I will make the proper correction. However, should you find that you need to make changes, it is my prayer that you will have the courage and conviction to do so. I'll be at the door as you leave should you have any question or would like to discuss the lesson further after the service. In the midst of my preaching, one in the audience (who I later learned was one of the members, the treasurer), interrupted me trying to ask questions. He indicated that he wanted to have a back and forth public discussion. I let him know that this was not designed to be a public

discussion, but would be happy to talk with him about his questions after the service. Then, I continued on with the lesson. After the service, as he approached me, I asked him, "What is your question?" He said he didn't want to just ask me personally, but wanted to ask it publicly and have a back and forth discussion (like a debate). I told him it was not my place to decide that, but if the men wanted to have a q & a session or provide an occasion for such, I would be happy to do that, but that is up to them. He left in a huff without asking or discussing his question with me. Another gentleman on his way out asked for clarification on a point, and I was able to spend time answering his question. The next night I began preaching as I did the night before with an added explanation as to why I chose not to take questions during the preaching - so as to maintain the continuity and flow of the lesson, so the audience would not become distracted from the points being made, to let all things be done unto edifying and to let all things be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14). I wanted to make it clear to them to know that I was not trying to avoid any questions. I mentioned that I was a guest invited by the men of the church to preach, and that one indicated he wanted to have a public discussion, that if the men wanted to have an occasion for that after the service, I would be happy to do that, but it is up to them and they can let me know. I mentioned that I would again be available after the service to answer or discuss with them any question they might have. I briefly reviewed the previous night's lesson on Authority, made application to the music question, and then began preaching on The Work Of The Church and Institutionalism. I talked about the difference between the individual and the church, the spiritual nature of the work, the fact that the work is Christ-directed, and had just finished talking about the threefold work of the church, when one of the men stood up and abruptly interrupted the service, saying that I had preached for 45 minutes and had not yet preached the gospel, he wasn't going to allow it to continue. I tried to reason with him, but he closed the service with prayer. In the midst of the sermon the treasurer who caused a disturbance the night before got up and walked out. It was obvious that there were two completely different reactions. Those in opposition were quite upset with me and my preaching. Those in agreement were very supportive, and greatly disturbed by what had taken place. One lady said, "I am ashamed and embarrassed." She indicated that they were going to stand for the truth. One brother asked about sending money to the Schultz-Lewis home. I asked him what is the Schultz-Lewis home. I wanted to see what his knowledge was of it. I simply asked, Where is the Scripture that authorizes the church to make a donation to an institution like that. He looked up and around, as if

he was dumbfounded, and walked off. The brother who ended the service was in another room of the building eating an ice cream cone with some his family and a couple of other members. I told him that I was very disappointed that he acted as he did without giving occasion for folks to respond to the Lord's invitation. I asked if I have taught error to please let me know what that is. He said come back Sunday that one would be here from the Shultz-Lewis home to talk about it. I informed him that I regret that I can't be here Sunday as I already am committed to preach in a meeting in Deckerville, MI, that I am here now and why doesn't he tell me. He said that I had condemned everything they were doing. I hadn't brought any accusations against the church or mentioned the Schultz Lewis home by name. He had made the application. I asked for the Scripture that authorized the church to make a donation to any kind of human institution. The only Scripture he cited was Galatians 6:10. I had covered that in the lesson, but went through it again with him. The only other arguments offered were we've been doing it this way for 40 years, all the other churches around here are doing it and they have elders, and all the good that comes from it. He tried to make an emotional appeal about the folks in Africa that are jumping up and down praising God for the wells they are drilling. I recognize there are many around the world in dire need and that drilling wells for folks to have water is a good work, but where is the Scripture that authorized the church to engage in the work of drilling wells? I mentioned that we could provide pure water, clean clothes and a comfortable home, but without preaching the gospel we haven't done one thing to save their soul. One said they sure hoped that the church didn't pay me. I made it known that should not be a concern as they could keep it, that I wouldn't be taking it. I asked if I would be allowed to preach again the next night, as the meeting was scheduled to go another night. He said he would. I asked if I would be allowed to finish and give folks an opportunity to respond to the gospel invitation. It was said as long as I didn't go overtime. I said I didn't know there was an end time, that no one informed me of it. I asked for the end time and he stormed out the door. Craig Thomas, Ryan's father, a dear brother, friend, and faithful gospel preacher, who came up from Bloomington, IN to support the meeting, and I followed him to the parking lot letting him know that we are not his enemy. We hugged him and let him know that we love him. One showed me a post one of the ladies of the church put on social media in which she referred to me as Satan and urged the men to stop these false teachers of Satan from infesting the Lord's church. The conservative brethren made it know they would plan to come back the next night. I went prepared to preach, not knowing what I would

find. None of the liberal brethren who were opposing the truth were present. All of those interested in holding fast the pattern came, including one who was weak physically unable to come the night before. I preached, "Ask For The Old Paths" from Jeremiah 6:16. It was the best service of the meeting. There was a completely different spirit and atmosphere, one of great reverence and respect for the Lord and His word. Ryan, the preacher, responded to the invitation asking for prayers of forgiveness for taking support from the church as the church was receiving and sending funds contrary to the New Testament pattern. It is obvious that the brethren present this night love Ryan and Jennifer, are very supportive of them and their work, want to hold the pattern, even if that means starting anew with a few.



Editor's note: Ryan is no stranger to the brethren here at Belleville as he was formerly a member of the congregation here. We will be supporting Ryan beginning this month. We hope he will be able to obtain sufficient support to remain in Grayling and that many others will be converted to the Lord. If you would like to send Ryan and Jennifer a word of encouragement his address is: Ryan Thomas, 337 E Huron ST, Gaylord, MI 49735.

Don't forget that our meeting with Leland Ping begins next Sunday, September 17.

Belleville church of Christ
 5635 S County Rd 200E - Belleville, IN - (317) 539-5258
www.bellevillechurch.net

Schedule of Services

Sunday Bible Study	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study	7:00 p.m.

Evangelist

James Hahn (317) 745-1507